Importantly, in the present invention, it is indicated that the retaining means comprises "a flap of flexible material integrally formed with and extending from said first edge of said body." Independent Claim 20 recites that the body has "a flap of flexible material integrally formed with and extending from one edge of said body." Applicant respectfully contends that this important feature of the present invention is neither shown nor suggested by the Rhodes patent.

In the original specification on page 1, lines 19 - 29, it was indicated that:

> Very often, the covers of these devices are provided with a decorative covering made of synthetic materials (thermoplastic sheets, knitted, woven or non-woven fabric) to form a lining piece.
>
> In this case, problems are posed in connection with the tear strength of the decorative material in the weakened zone of the covers. The lining piece then has to be removed completely to enable the retaining device to function.
>
> Complex, costly systems for swinging and retaining the lining piece upon the triggering of the retaining system have thus been developed. Sometimes, even, the proximity of the vehicle occupant precludes the use of such devices and, as a result, one is faced with an impossible situation.

The present invention overcomes this problem by integrally forming the "retaining means" from the material of the body. As such, the possibility of releasing the cover during the inflation of the air bag, the tearing of the cover, or the possible projectiles created from such tearing action are effectively avoided.

The Rhodes patent cites a device that is very similar to that of the prior art referred to in the original application. In particular, the "retaining means" cited by the Examiner is simply a tether 33 which has one end riveted to the vehicle body work and another end riveted to the outer lining material of the air bag cover. As was stated in column 4, lines 43 - 46 of the Rhodes patent:

> A tether 33 is secured between the front edge 10c and a retainer 14a on the instrument panel 16 to control upward pivotal movement of the door 10.

As can be seen in the drawings, the end of the tether is simply riveted to the outer skin of the cover. This outer skin is simply a decorative covering as was stated in column 3, lines 56 - 65 of the Rhodes patent as follows:

> In accordance with the invention, the door assembly includes a vinyl outer cover 32 which can be formed from cast vinyl material by processes such as those set forth in U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,664,864 and 4,184,911, both commonly assigned to the same assignee as in the present application and incorporated by reference herein. Such outer covers 32 have colors and grain appearances that are accurately matched to the appearance of the surface of an associated interior trim product such as the illustrated instrument panel. The vinyl outer cover 32 has edge portions 32a thereon formed over the peripheral edge 34a of a first construction substrate 34 of the type which is mounted on a lid of a foam mold.

There is nothing in the Rhodes patent to indicate that the tear resistance achieved by the riveting of the tether to the vinyl outer layer of the air bag door is greater than the separation of the VELCRO (TM) portions at the other end of the air bag door. Applicant respectfully contends that unless the flap is integrally formed with the material of the cover, the possibility exists of the air bag door tearing from its riveted connection and acting as a projectile within the passenger compartment. Additionally, it is possible that the riveted connection between the tether and the vehicle body work or the connection between the tether and the air bag door could come loose and serve as a projectile within the vehicle passenger compartment during the activation of the air bag. The present invention overcomes these problems by assuring that the flap of flexible material used for the retaining means is integral with the material of the body.

Applicant also notes the Examiner's analysis in which it is indicated that the Rhodes patent

lacks the use of the "thermoformable synthetic cellular material" of the first of the body. Such a material was particularly chosen for use in the present invention because of the advantages associated with such material. As was stated on page 5, lines 10 - 20 of the original specification:

> It is constituted, for example, by a thermoformable synthetic cellular material, in particular a thermoplastic or semi-thermoplastic material such as polyolefins. It may possibly take the form of a foam.
>
> By way of a non-limitative example, the material used to constitute the said formation and maintaining layer 8 has, for example, a density of 10 to 100 kg/m^3, in particular approximately 50 kg/m^3.
>
> It thus enables the risks of fragmentation of cover 1 under the thrust of retaining device 6 when it expands to be reduced.
>
> It is also to be noted that the material chosen is capable, for example, of preserving its mechanical properties over a large range of temperatures, for example from -35 to +80°C.

Applicant respectfully contends that one having ordinary skill in the art of air bag covers would not have found the use of such material to be "obvious" in order to achieve the properties desired of the present invention.

Based upon the foregoing analysis, Applicant contends that independent Claims 17 and 20 are now in a proper condition for allowance. Additionally, those claims which are dependent upon these independent claims should similarly be in condition for allowance. Reconsideration of the

rejections is requested and allowance of the claims at an early date is earnestly solicited. Since no additional claims have been added above those originally paid for, no additional fee is required.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date

John S. Egbert
Reg. No. 30,627
Attorney for Applicant

Harrison & Egbert
412 Main Street, 7th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002
(713)224-8080
(713)223-4873 (Fax)